



BURNING DAYLIGHT

BY JACK LONDON

AUTHOR OF "THE CALL OF THE WILD," "WHITE FANG," "MARTIN EDEN," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DEARBORN MELVILL

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The young man laughed and shook his head.

"No, I'm a telegraph operator. But the wife and I decided to take a two-years' vacation, and . . . here we are. But the time's about up. I'm going back into the office this fall after I get the grapes off."

As Daylight listened, there came to him a sudden envy of this young fellow living right in the midst of all this which Daylight had traveled through the last few hours.

"What in thunder are you going back to the telegraph office for?" he demanded.

The young man smiled with a certain wistfulness.

"Because we can't get ahead here. (He hesitated an instant), and because there are added expenses coming. The rent, small as it is, counts; and besides, I'm not strong enough to effectually farm the place. If I owned it, or if I were a real husky like you, I'd ask nothing better. Nor would the wife." Again the wistful smile hovered on his face. "You see, we're country born, and after bucking with cities for a few years, we kind of like the country best. We've planned to get ahead, though, and then some day we'll buy a patch of land and stay with it."

Daylight could not persuade himself to keep to the traveled roads that day, and another cut across country to Glen Ellen brought him upon a canyon that so blocked his way that he was glad to follow a friendly cow-path. This led him to a small frame cabin. The doors and windows were open, and a cat was nursing a litter of kittens in the doorway, but no one seemed at home. He descended the trail that evidently crossed the canyon. Part way down, he met an old man coming up through the sunset. In his hand he carried a pall of foamy milk. He wore no hat, and in his face, framed with snow-white hair and beard, was the ruddy glow and content of the passing summer day. Daylight thought that he had never seen so contented looking a being.

"How old are you, daddy?" he queried.

"Eighty-four," was the reply. "Yes, sirree, eighty-four, and spryer than most."

"You must a' taken good care of yourself," Daylight suggested.

"I don't know about that. I ain't loafed none. I walked across the plains with an ox team and fit Indians in '51, and I was a family man with seven youngsters. I reckon I was as old then as you are now, or pretty nigh on to it."

"Don't you find it lonely here?"

The old man shifted the pall of milk and reflected.

"That all depends," he said oracularly. "I ain't never been lonely except when the old wife died. Some fellers are lonely in a crowd, and I'm one of them. That's the only time I'm lonely, is when I go to Frisco. But I don't go no more, thank you 'most to death. This is good enough for me. I've been right here in this valley since '54—one of the first settlers after the Spaniards."

The old man chuckled, and Daylight rode on, singularly at peace with himself and all the world. It seemed that the old contentment of trail and camp he had known on the Yukon had come back to him. He could not shake from his eyes the picture of the old pioneer coming up the trail through the sunset light. He was certainly going some for eighty-four. The thought of following his example entered Daylight's mind, but the big game of San Francisco vetoed the idea.

CHAPTER XII.

Instead of returning to the city on Monday, Daylight rented the butcher's horse for another day and crossed the bed of the valley to its eastern hills. As on the previous day, just for the joy of it, he followed cattle-trails at haphazard and worked his way up toward the summits. Coming out upon a wagon road that led upward, he followed it for several miles, emerging in a small, mountain-encircled valley, where half a dozen poor ranchers farmed the wine-grapes on the steep slopes. Beyond, the road pitched upward. Dense chaparral covered the exposed hillsides, but in the creases of the canyons huge spruce trees grew, and wild oats and flowers.

Late in the afternoon he broke through, and followed a well-defined trail down a dry canyon. The dry canyon gave place to one with a slender ribbon of running water. The trail ran into a wood-road, and the wood-road emerged across a small flat upon a slightly traveled country road. There were no farms in this immediate section, and no houses. The soil was meager, the bed-rock either close to the surface or constituting the surface itself. Manzanita and scrub-oak, however, flourished and walled the road on either side with a jungle growth. And out a runway through this growth a man suddenly scuttled

in a way that reminded Daylight of a rabbit.

He was a little man, in patched overalls; bareheaded, with a cotton shirt open at the throat and down the chest. The sun was ruddy-brown in his face, and by it his sandy hair was bleached on the ends to peroxide blonde. He signed to Daylight to halt, and held up a letter.

"If you're going to town, I'd be obliged if you mail this," he said.

"I sure will," Daylight put it into his coat pocket. "Do you live hereabouts, stranger?"

But the little man did not answer. He was gazing at Daylight in a surprised and steadfast fashion.

"I know you," the little man announced. "You're Elari Harnish—Burning Daylight, the papers call you. Am I right?"

Daylight nodded.

"Well, I'm glad I wrote that letter this afternoon," the little man went on, "or else I'd have missed seeing you. I've seen your photo in the papers many a time, and I've a good memory for faces. I recognized you at once. My name's Ferguson."

"Do you live hereabouts?" Daylight repeated his query.

"Oh, yes. I've got a little shack back here in the bush a hundred yards and a pretty spring, and a few fruit trees and berry bushes. Come in and take a look. And that spring is a dandy. You never tasted water like it. Come in, and try it."

Walking and leading his horse, Daylight followed the quick-stepping, eager little man through the green tunnel and emerged abruptly upon the clearing, if clearing it might be called, where wild nature and man's earthscratching were inextricably blended. It was a tiny nook in the hills, protected by the steep walls of a canyon mouth. Here were several large oaks, evidencing a richer soil. The erosion of ages from the hillside had slowly formed this deposit of fat earth. Under the oaks, almost buried in them,



"What Do You Think of It, Eh?"

stood a rough, unpainted cabin, the wide veranda of which, with chairs and hammocks, advertised an out-of-doors bedchamber. Daylight's keen eyes took in everything. The clearing was irregular, following the patches of the best soil, and every fruit tree and berry bush, and even each vegetable plant, had the water personally conducted to it. The tiny irrigation channels were everywhere, and along some of them the water was running.

Ferguson looked eagerly into his visitor's face for signs of approbation.

"What do you think of it, eh?"

"Hand-reared and manicured, every blessed tree," Daylight laughed, but the joy and satisfaction that shone in his eyes contented the little man.

"Why, d'y'e know, I know every one of those trees as if they were sons of mine. I planted them, nursed them, fed them, and brought them up. Come on and peep at the spring."

"It's sure a hummer," was Daylight's verdict, after due inspection and sampling, as they turned back for the house.

The interior was a surprise. The cooking being done in the small, lean-to kitchen, the whole cabin formed a large living-room. A great table in the middle was comfortably littered with books and magazines. All the available wall space, from wall to ceiling, was occupied by filled bookshelves. It seemed to Daylight that he had never seen so many books assembled in one place. Skins of wildcat, coon and deer lay about on the pine-board floor.

Daylight found himself charmed and made curious by the little man. Why was he hiding away here in the chaparral, he and his books? So it was, when between them they had washed and wiped the dishes and put them away, and had settled down to a comfortable smoke, that Daylight put his question.

"Look here, Ferguson. Every since we got together, I've been casting

about to find out what's wrong with you, to locate a screw loose somewhere, but I'll be damned if I've succeeded. What are you doing here, anyway?"

Ferguson frankly showed his pleasure at the questions.

"First of all," he began, "the doctors wound up by losing all hope for me. Gave me a few months at best, and that, after a course in sanitariums and a trip to Europe and another to Hawaii. They tried electricity and forced feeding and fasting. I was a graduate of about everything in the curriculum. They kept me poor with their bills, while I went from bad to worse. The trouble with me was twofold; first I was a born weakling; and next, I was living unnaturally—too much work and responsibility and strain. I was managing editor of the Times-Tribune in San Francisco, and I wasn't strong enough for the strain. Of course my body went back on me, and my mind, too, for that matter. It had to be bolstered up with whisky, which wasn't good for it any more than was the living in clubs and hotels good for my stomach and the rest of me. So I quit, quit everything, absolutely, and came to live in the Valley of the Moon—that's the Indian name, you know, for Sonoma Valley. I lived in the lean-to the first year; then I built the cabin and sent for my books. I never knew what happiness was before, nor health. Look at me now and dare to tell me that I look forty-seven."

"I wouldn't give a day over forty," Daylight confessed.

"Yet the day I came here I looked

and send the machine back around tonight with the chauffeur." But Swiftwater Bill failed to see why he should not go into Oakland by way of Blair Park, and so decided. The next moment, flying around a bend, the back-road they were not going to take appeared. Inside the gate, leaning out from her saddle and just closing it, was a young woman on a chestnut sorrel. With his first glimpse, Daylight felt there was something strangely familiar about her. The next moment, straightening up in the saddle with a movement he could not fail to identify, she put the horse into a gallop, riding away with her back toward them. It was Dede Mason—he remembered what Morrison had told him about her keeping a riding horse, and he was glad she had not seen him in this riotous company. Intervening trees at that moment shut her from view, and Swiftwater Bill plunged into the problem of disposing of their constable, while Daylight, leaning back with closed eyes, was still seeing Dede Mason gallop off down the country road.



Here Was a Man Who Laughed at City Dwellers and Called Them Lunatics.

nearer sixty, and that was fifteen years ago."

They talked along, and Daylight looked at the world from new angles. Here was a man, neither bitter nor cynical, who laughed at the city-dwellers and called them lunatics; a man who did not care for money, and in whom the lust for power had long since died.

It was not until ten o'clock that Daylight parted from Ferguson. As he rode along through the starlight, the idea came to him of buying the ranch on the other side of the valley. There was no thought in his mind of ever intending to live on it. His game was in San Francisco. But he liked the ranch, and as soon as he got back to the office he would open up negotiations with Hillard.

The time passed, and he played on, at the game. San Francisco's attitude toward Daylight had undergone a change. While he, with his slashing buccaneer methods, was a distinct menace to the more orthodox financial gamblers, he was nevertheless so grave a menace that they were glad enough to let him alone. He had already taught them the excellence of letting a sleeping dog lie.

Dede Mason was still in the office. He had made no more overtures, discussed no more books. He had no active interest in her, and she was to him a pleasant memory of what had never happened, a joy, which, by his essential nature, he was barred from ever knowing. Yet, while his interest had gone to sleep and his energy was consumed in the endless battles he waged, he knew every trick of the light on her hair, every quick definite mannerism of movement, every line of her figure as expounded by her tailor-made gowns. Several times, six months or so apart, he had increased her salary, until now she was receiving ninety dollars a month. Beyond this he dared not go, though he got around it by making the work easier. This he had accomplished after her return from a vacation, by retaining her substitute as an assistant. Also, he had changed his office suite, so that now the two girls had a room by themselves. The more he saw of her, and the more he thought he knew of her, the more unapproachable did she seem to him. But since he had no intention of approaching her, this was anything but an unsatisfactory fact. He was glad he had her in his office, and hoped she'd stay, and that was about all.

Daylight did not improve with the passing years. The life was not good for him. He was growing stout and soft, and there was unaccounted flabbiness in his muscles. The more he drank cocktails, the more he was compelled to drink in order to get the desired result, the inhibitions that eased him down from the concert pitch of his operations. And with this went wine, tea, at meals, and the long drinks after dinner of Scotch and soda at the Riverside. Then, too, his body suffered from lack of exercise; and, from lack of decent human associa-

tions, his moral fibers were weakening. Never a man to hide anything, some of his escapades became public, such as speeding, and of joy-rides in his big red motor car, though not his own, the guest of Swiftwater Bill, Luck's own darling, who had come down to spend the clean-up of the seventh fortune wrung from the frozen Arctic gravel. It was a merry party, and they had made a merry day of it, circling the bay from San Francisco around by San Jose and up to Oakland, having been thrice arrested for speeding, the third time, however, on the Haywards stretch, running away with their captor. Fearing that a telephone message to arrest them had been flashed ahead, they had turned into the back-road through the hills, and now, rushing in upon Oakland by a new route, were boisterously discussing what disposition they should make of the constable.

"Well, come out at Blair Park in ten minutes," one of the men announced. "Look here, Swiftwater, there's a cross-road right ahead, with lots of gates, but it'll take us back-country into Berkeley. Then we can come back into Oakland from the other side, sneak across on the trolley

CHAPTER XIII.

One Sunday, late in the afternoon, found Daylight across the bay in the Piedmont hills of Oakland. As usual, he was in a big motor car, though not his own, the guest of Swiftwater Bill, Luck's own darling, who had come down to spend the clean-up of the seventh fortune wrung from the frozen Arctic gravel. It was a merry party, and they had made a merry day of it, circling the bay from San Francisco around by San Jose and up to Oakland, having been thrice arrested for speeding, the third time, however, on the Haywards stretch, running away with their captor. Fearing that a telephone message to arrest them had been flashed ahead, they had turned into the back-road through the hills, and now, rushing in upon Oakland by a new route, were boisterously discussing what disposition they should make of the constable.

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On Monday morning, coming in for dictation, he looked at her with new interest, though he gave no sign of it; and the stereotyped business passed off in the stereotyped way. But the following Sunday found him on a horse himself, across the bay and riding through the Piedmont hills. He made a long day of it, but no glimpse did he catch of Dede Mason, though he even took the back-road of many gates and rode on into Berkeley. It had been a fruitless day, so far as she was concerned; and yet not entirely fruitless, for he had enjoyed the open air and the horse under him to such purpose that, on Monday, his instructions were out to the dealers to look for the best chestnut sorrel that money could buy. At odd times during the week he examined numbers of chestnut sorrels, tried several and was unsatisfied. It was not till Saturday that he came upon Bob. Daylight knew him for what he wanted the moment he laid eyes on him. A large horse for a riding animal, he was none too large for a big man like Daylight. In splendid condition, Bob's coat in the sunlight was a flame of fire, his arched neck a jewelled conflagration.

Daylight examined the mane and found it finer than any horse's hair he had ever seen. Also, its color was unusual in that it was almost auburn. While he ran his fingers through it, Bob turned his head and playfully nuzzled Daylight's shoulder.

"Saddle him up, and I'll try him," he told the dealer. "I wonder if he's used to spurs. No English saddle, mind. Give me a good Mexican and a curb bit—not too severe, seeing as he likes to rear."

Daylight superintended the preparations, adjusting the curb strap and the stirrup length, and doing the cinching. He shook his head at the martingale, but yielded to the dealer's advice to allow it to go on. And Bob, beyond, spirited restlessness and a few playful attempts, gave no trouble. Nor in the hour's riding that followed, save for some permissible curvetting and prancing, did he misbehave. Daylight was delighted; the purchase was immediately made; and Bob, with riding gear and personal equipment, was dispatched across the bay forthwith to take up his quarters in the stables of the Oakland Riding Academy.

The next day being Sunday, Daylight was away early, crossing on the ferry and taking with him Wolf, the leader of his sled team, the one dog which he had selected to bring with him when he left Alaska. Quiet as he would through the Piedmont hills and along the ray-gated back-road to Berkeley, Daylight saw nothing of Dede Mason and her chestnut sorrel, but he had little time for disappointment, for his own chestnut kept him busy. At the end of half an hour of goodness Daylight, broad into confidence, was riding along at a walk and rolling a cigarette, with slack knees and relaxed seat, the reins lying on the under his neck. Bob whined abruptly and with behavior suggestive of a dog, and Daylight, looking down at his hind legs, saw that he had kicked the curb of the ground. Daylight kept his seat, but beyond a futile rein across the neck, did nothing to prevent the evolution.

"Well, Bob," he addressed the animal, at the same time wiping the sweat from his own eyes, "I'm free to confess that you're sure the blamedest all-fired quickest creature I ever saw. I guess the way to fix you is to keep the spur just a-touching—ah! you brute!"

For the moment the spur touched him, his left hind leg had reached forward in a kick that struck the stirrup a smart blow. Several times, out of curiosity, Daylight attempted the spur, and each time Bob's hoof landed the stirrup. Then Daylight, following the horse's example of the unexpected, suddenly drove both spurs into him and reached him underneath with the quirt.

"You ain't never had a real licking before," he muttered, as Bob, thus rudely jerked out of the circle of his own impish mental processes, shot ahead.

Half a dozen times spurs and quirt hit into him, and then Daylight settled down to enjoy the magnificent gallop. No longer punished, at the end of a half mile Bob eased down into a fast canter. Wolf, toiling the rear, was catching up, and everything was going nicely. And when, at last, Daylight decided that the horse had had enough, he turned him around abruptly and put him into a gentle canter on the forward track. After a time, he reined in to a stop to see if he were breathing painfully. Standing for a minute, Bob turned his head and nuzzled his rider's stirrup in a quish impatient way, as much as to intimate that it was time they were going on.

"Well, I'll be plumb gosh darned!" was Daylight's comment. "No ill-will, no grudge, no nothing—and after that lambasting! You're sure a hummer, Bob."

He had taken a liking to the animal, and repented not of his bargain. He realized that Bob was not vicious nor mean, the trouble being that he was bursting with high spirits and was endowed with more than the average horse's intelligence. It was the spirits and the intelligence, combined with inordinate restlessness, that made him what he was. What was required to control him was a strong hand, with tempered sternness and yet with the requisite touch of brutal dominance.

Throughout the week Daylight found himself almost as much interested in Bob as in Dede; and, not being in the thick of any big deals, he was probably more interested in both of them than in the business game. Bob's trick of whirling was of special moment to him. How to overcome it—that was the thing. Suppose he did meet with Dede out in the hills; and suppose by some lucky stroke of fate, he should manage to be riding alongside of her; then that whirl of Bob's



It Was Dede.

would be most disconcerting and embarrassing. He was not particularly anxious for her to see him thrown forward on Bob's neck. On the other hand, suddenly to leave her and go dashing down the back-track, plying quirt and spurs, wouldn't do, either. What was wanted was a method wherewith to prevent that lightning whirl. He must stop the animal before it got around. The reins would not do this. Neither would the spurs. Remained the quirt. But how to accomplish it? Bob always whirled to the right. Very well. He would double the quirt in his hand, and, the instant of the whirl, that double quirt would rap Bob on the nose. The horse didn't live, after it once learned the lesson, that would whirl in the face of the doubled quirt.

More keenly than ever, during that week in the office, did Daylight realize that he had no social, nor even human contacts with Dede. The situation was such that he could not ask her the simple question whether or not she was riding riding next Sunday. Thus he found another card in the hand of the mad god had dealt him. How important that card was to become he did not dream, yet he decided that it was a pretty good card.

Sunday came, and Bob, out in the Piedmont hills, behaved like an angel. His goodness at times was of the quipped, prancing order, but other times he was a lamb. But no Dede did Daylight encounter. He vainly circled about among the hill roads, and in the afternoon took the steep grade over the divide of the second range and dropped into Maraga Valley. Just after passing the foot of the second range he heard the hoof-beats of a cantering horse. It was from ahead and coming toward him. What if it were Dede? He turned Bob around and started a return at a walk. The canter came nearer, but he faced straight ahead until he heard the horse behind check

to a walk. Then he glanced over his shoulder. It was Dede. The recognition was quick, and, with her, accompanied by surprise. What more natural thing than that, partly turning his horse, he should wait till she caught up with him; and that, when abreast, they should continue abreast on up the grade? He could have sighed with relief. The thing was accomplished, and so easily. Greetings had been exchanged; here they were side by side and going in the same direction with miles and miles ahead of them.

He noted that her eye was first for the horse and next for him.

"Oh, what a beauty!" she had cried at sight of Bob. From the shining light in her eyes, and the face filled with delight, he would scarcely have believed that it belonged to the young woman he had known in the office the young woman with the controlled subdued office face.

"I didn't know you rode," was one of her first remarks. "I imagined you were wedded to get-there-quick machines."

Thus, and to his great relief, they launched on a topic of mutual interest. He told her about Bob's tricks and of the whirl and his scheme to overcome it; and she agreed that horses had to be handled with a certain rational severity, no matter how much one loved them. There was Mab, which she had had for eight years, and which she had had to break of snick-kicking. The process had been brutal for Mab, but it had cured her. "You've ridden a lot," Daylight said.

"I really can't remember the first time I was on a horse," she told him. "I was born on a ranch, you know, and they couldn't keep me away from the horses."

And thereat she told him more of her ranch life in the days before her father died. And Daylight was hugely pained with himself. They were getting acquainted. The conversation had not lagged in the full half hour they had been together. When she talked, he listened and followed her, and yet all the while he was following his own thoughts and impressions as well. It was a nervy thing for her to do, this riding astride, and he didn't know, after all, whether he liked it, or not. His ideas of women were prone to be old-fashioned; they were the ones he had imbibed in the early day, frontier life of his youth, when no woman was seen on anything but a side-saddle. He had grown up to the tacit fiction that women on horseback were not bled. It came to him with a shock, this sight of her so manlike in her saddle. But he had to confess that the sight looked good to him just the same.

CHAPTER XIV.

Another Sunday man and horse and dog roved the Piedmont hills. And again Daylight and Dede rode together. But this time her surprise at meeting him was tinged with suspicion; or rather, her surprise was of another order. The previous Sunday had been quite accidental, but his appearing the second time among her favorite haunts hinted of more than the fortuitous. Daylight was made to feel that she suspected him, and he, remembering that he had seen a big rock quarry near Blair Park, stated offhand that he was thinking of buying it. His one-time investment in a brickyard had put the idea into his head—an idea that he decided was a good one, for it enabled him to suggest that she ride along with him to inspect the quarry.

So several hours he spent in her company, in which she was much the same girl as before, natural, unaffected, light-hearted, smiling and laughing, a good fellow, talking horses with unflagging enthusiasm, making friends with the crusty-tempered Wolf, and expressing a desire to ride Bob, whom she declared she was more in love with than ever. Against his better judgment, Daylight gave in, and, on an unfrequented stretch of road, changed saddles and bridles.



"I Could Ride With One of the Clerks Without Remark, but With You—No."

"Remember, he's greased lightning," he warned, as he helped her to mount.

She nodded, while Bob pricked up his ears to the knowledge that he had a strange rider on his back. The fun came quickly enough—too quickly for Dede, who found herself against Bob's neck as he pivoted around and trotted the other way. Daylight followed on her horse and watched. He saw her check the animal quickly to a standstill, and immediately, with rein across neck and a decisive prod of Greenville.